



CONNECTICUT AFL-CIO

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Testimony of Lori Pelletier

Secretary-Treasurer of the Connecticut AFL-CIO

Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee

February 17, 2011

Senator Prague and Representative Zalaski and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, I am Lori Pelletier and I serve as the Secretary-Treasurer of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, and I'm here to testify on behalf of the 900 affiliated local unions who represent 220,000 working women and men from every city and town in our great state.

S.B. No. 935 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ELIMINATION OF STATE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR COMPANIES THAT REDUCE RETIREMENT BENEFITS. We support this legislation. This legislation stops the practice of making retirees the scapegoats when it comes to cutting costs. When workers retire they are on a fixed income, and if the company they retire from who is receiving state assistance, chooses to eliminate or reduce retiree benefits the state should not condone this action.

S.B. No. 937 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE FOR CERTAIN STATE EMPLOYEES AND GRADUATE ASSISTANTS AT STATE UNIVERSITIES. We support this legislation. When the National Labor Relations Act was signed into law some of the jurisdiction on which employees should have the right to collectively bargain was left up to the states. Over the years we have worked to eliminate these exemptions and extend to all Connecticut residents the freedom of assembly. This bill is another step toward recognizing the value and worth of all workers.

However, we believe this bill does not go far enough. Regardless of your occupation, if there are three or more employees the right to collectively bargain should be yours for the asking. We appreciate the bill being raised, but we are very disappointed that the committee continues to ignore the plight and allow the exploitation of farm workers and others in the agricultural business. All work should be respected as should all workers, and the right to collectively bargain is about respect and dignity on the job.

When Dr. King got assassinated in 1968 he was in Memphis because the Sanitation workers wanted respect. People treated them as second (or even third) class citizens, like property. The "I AM A MAN" signs carried by those vital municipal employees were as poignant to them as they would be if farm workers carried them today. I have had numerous conversations regarding this issue, and it is of great distress to me that there is more concern about the cows on the farm than the very workers who take care of them.

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The right to collectively bargain does not put companies out of business, poor management does. The right to collectively bargain does however provide workers with a voice on their job independent of the bosses. I am proud of the work done here by my predecessors to ensure that workers have the ability to bargain collectively, now is the time to continue that work and in turn give workers a much needed voice on the job.

H.B. No. 5464 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING STATE EMPLOYEES AND VIOLENCE AND BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE. (LAB) We support this legislation. Every 16 hours a worker dies on the job, and once every eighty hours that employee is murdered on the job. Violence and bullying are a growing epidemic and a costly one too. According to Business Week magazine bullying "increases employee turnover, it causes a loss of productivity" both of which means additional costs to the State. This legislation is an important one for both the worker and the State.

H.B. No. 6328 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TIMETABLES FOR MUNICIPAL BINDING ARBITRATION. We oppose this legislation. For decades municipalities have raised this as the reason for their budgets being out of balance. Anyone who is familiar with the timelines understand where the real costs are, and until city and towns chief elected officials are willing to take on the role of chief negotiator and stop hiring the armies of outside high-priced law firms we will continue to see this red herring.

H.B. No. 6329 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE MAINTENANCE OF HEALTH INSURANCE FOR SPOUSES AND DEPENDENTS OF CERTAIN DECEASED POLICE OFFICERS AND FIREFIGHTERS WHO HAVE DIED IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR DUTIES. We support this legislation. Budgets are tight, however when a family makes the supreme sacrifice of losing a loved one we as a society should honor their sacrifice and provide this basic human need. It's tragic enough dealing with a death on the job but to then add to that financial suffering as well? I think we are better than that.

We appreciate the Committee holding this public hearing.